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THE CO-OPERATION OF SCHOOL AND HOME

By Miss Charlotte M. Mason.

I am glad of an opportunity to bring before this Congress a few suggestions on the subject of the Co-operation of School and Home. The isolation of the School is calamitous. During their school-life boys and girls move in a sphere of thought distinct from, and touching the home sphere only in such points as prizes, marks, breakings-up, & so on. When we consider that the school is primarily a place where children go to get knowledge, & that the desire for knowledge is common to all of us, children & parents alike; that the sorts of knowledge good & profitable for children are those in which parents take a natural interest, we see that the school has a double function, - to impart knowledge to the child & to keep alive in his home a certain intellectual stir. The Heads of schools might well take into account that they have to deal with both children & parents, & that it rests with them to raise the tone of public opinion not only in the next generation but in the present. If they fail in this, their scholars suffer; either home is too strong for school & any intellectual activity that had been aroused ceases with school-life, ranks, in fact, as a mere episode; or, supposing school to have proved itself the stronger of the two forces, the young person finds himself with few interests in common with his family.

Most evils are traceable to definite causes & probably the idea of developing the 'faculties' of a child has launched the teaching profession on a rather sterilising course

~~of instruction. Everyone knows that a bright child has all his faculties in full play before he is devitalised by bad teaching. So, too, has the dull & slow child though his intellectual powers be not of the same order. When we realise that knowledge is food which the mind knows how to deal with, as well as does the body with its proper aliment, we shall cease to depend upon oral teaching; & mental gymnastics will be for occasional & not general use.~~

How Children should get their knowledge where we get it ourselves, - out of books. We receive a certain degree of mental titillation, & interest, no doubt, from lectures but, for the clear & definite understanding of a subject, we go to the best book to be had on that subject, and children should do the same. They are the true Encyclopedists, demanding knowledge of many subjects, and for each subject they should have a whole book, or several books, - the best books (in so far as they are of a literary character) and complete books, to be read all through chapter by chapter, each chapter (or part of a chapter) to be known at a single reading. Now we get that Bridge Bifrost which should connect school and home. A boy should collect between 200 & 300 volumes, which he has read & knows, during his school career. Hardly any of these, not even the books he had as a little fellow of seven, should be of a sort that he could not fail to turn over with interest at any time of his life. There ^{fore} they are such as ^{many} his parents read with interest & discuss with animation.

Here we get at once co-operation, resting on a sound intellectual basis between home & school. Such co-operation would be more immediate in the day than in the boarding-school; but in the latter case, too, the gradual growth of the young scholar's

Library would be watched by his parents with very great interest. It is commonly supposed that parents will not buy books, but, from perhaps unusually wide experience in this matter, I can say that it very seldom happens that a parent is unwilling to buy a desirable book. He does not care to buy books that are of no earthly use or interest to anybody outside the school-room, but these need be but a negligible quantity.

Having made out his curriculum for each class, allowing a score or two of books for each boy, according to class, which he requires the parents to buy in the holidays, that they may have an opportunity of looking them over in advance, (it is well to arrange that a single shop shall supply all the books wanted), it seems to me that the teacher of the day-school might yet do something more to secure intellectual co-operation between school and home.

For instance, the parents of children of seven would like to see reproductions of the half-dozen pictures by Titian, or Corot, or Rembrandt, which their child is to study that term; to be reminded of the Pilgrim's Progress & to hear a stirring page from the Heroes of Asgard. Mrs Frewen Lord's Tales from S. Paul's would be as interesting to the parents as to their boys and girls, & so, too, would a slight summary of the work to be done in the term & an illustrative passage, read here and there, would I believe, be found of very great interest to parents; while as for the 'pacing', painting, singing, claymodelling, drill and so on, these things are usually interesting.

The interest of the parents in the school-work should naturally increase as the children get older. Thus, for children of 9 or 10, a passage from Plutarch's Alexander, might be

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read, with a little résumé of the whole; from Shakespeare's Richard IIIrd; from Lytton's The Last of the Barons; telling passages from their histories of England and of France, from Buckley's Life and Her Children, from a description of Herefordshire, & so on, with in each case a slight résumé of the term's work, and a few words on the Handicrafts, pictures to be studied, drawing, singing, etc., to be accomplished in the term, would be likely to interest parents.

Now we come to what might be called the Middle School (4 boys & girls ranging from about 12-15) where the books increase in interest. Morals are definitely studied & a passage from Our-selves might be read. Also one from Macaulay's Essay on Clive, from their books on French & English History, from Redgauntlet, from Paul et Virginie (with an outline of the story) & so on, from She Stoops to Conquer, etc.

Class IV, the Upper School, (from 15-18) affords, ~~77~~ besides definite work in Languages & Mathematics, much delightful reading; for example, Maurice's Prophets & Kings, Ethics (Aristotle), Trench's Past & Present, Emma, The School for Scandal, Coleridge, The Life of Queen Louisa of Prussia, The Household of the Lafayettes, etc, according to the period in Green's Shorter History, in Lord's Modern Europe, ^{and} in De Tocqueville's L'Ancien Régime, which they may be studying: a short account of that part set for the term in some half-dozen such books, with readings, would be found stimulating & interesting.

I have not tried evenings of the kind with parents but believe the idea would commend itself to teachers. The books mentioned are from the curriculum for one term in a school which

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is now doing its fifty-first term's work on these lines with cordial co-operation on the part of parents.

The terminal examination-answers which are sent home to the parents, uncorrected but reported upon, also tend to happy co-operation. I know of one large preparatory day-school (of about 60 boys) where nearly half the little boys are too young to write steadily for the school-hours of a week (with intervals) though they delight in their examinations. The Master has hit upon the happy ~~very~~ device of asking mothers, school-boy brothers, governesses, etc., to come and write at the little fellows' dictation and "still the wonder grew

Small type "How one small head could carry all he knew".

I have confined myself in the above short paper to the means of securing intellectual co-operation between Home and School, & the whole question turns on the use of books, many, living, delightful, books. One more point I should like to urge. This wide curriculum, based on books, affords in itself, a sound & broad moral training, not only because most of the books read are profitable "for example of life & instruction in manners" but also because mental vacuity is a fertile source of wrong-thinking & wrong-doing.

May I repeat that the kind of education I suggest (Which is, of course, followed to some extent in all good schools) rarely fails to meet with a sympathetic response from parents. They find their ~~very~~ children "such interesting companions" & ^{many} of the school studies are of a sort in which they can themselves participate. The books supply a channel for intellectual interests between the school & the home.

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N.B. I may add that to read many books takes less time than ^{does} the curriculum of most schools. There need be no home-work and the afternoon is devoted to field-work & handicrafts, so that only the morning school-hours are spent in study. I have made no mention of studies except such, as, ~~yyy~~ ~~yyyyyy~~ because they are literary, may induce the co-operation of parents.

Charles M. Mason

3.2. 1917.

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Sir

My letter to the Times Educational Supplement of the 15th February has met with so wide a response that perhaps in the interest of your readers & of National Education you would allow me to make a further exposition of a method which rests upon a few seemingly unimportant discoveries as to the behaviour of mind. The results of practices founded on these methods are so surprising & delightful, so altogether profitable to the nation, that I believe, Sir, you will be furthering the cause to which you do such admirable service by allowing me to make some of them known through your columns.

For example, -- a slight (unofficial) inspection was made last week of some Council Schools working on this method. Here is the report of the work at the moment in one class of a school of over 200 girls; not, by the way, the school to which I referred in my last letter. Standard IV -- a beautiful class, very alive. Children were reading aloud with good dramatic feeling. They had taken Act II & were asked to paraphrase it and one gave a most lucid description of a very wordy conversation. Three then came to the front & repeated in parts a small scene without books. A girl chooses her own players & they learn their parts near the close of one afternoon. Twenty-five bought copies of Twelfth Night last term out of a class of 40 as their mothers wanted to read it, & in one home the father, mother & children read it through in four nights, each taking a character.

Think of the delicious chuckling of that family over Malvolio's cross-parting, or what a memory for after life would that really be.

Shakespeare

this be a worthy offering for our men when they come back - a home in which family readings of Shakesperarev, Scott & the like, make life ~~joy~~ joyous & full of interest? It may be said there is nothing new in that. Does'nt every school get up a play of Shakespeare every year? But, in this case may I call attention to the fact that there is no getting up, ~~no~~ ^{the} teaching, ~~no~~ ^{or} explanation; the children simply read & know.

We draw large drafts upon the intelligence of children & such drafts are not dishonoured in one case out of a hundred; in fact, I do not know of the @'one' case.

These are, roughly speaking, the principles we act upon: Everyone has a mind: mind, like body, must be fed: children, our experience seems to show, have minds of ^{the} calibre & power that they will have throughout life; that is, all children are not equal, but every child is equal to himself at his best & at any period of his life: ^{thereof} that is, the functions which Education has hitherto taken upon herself of 'developing the faculties', 'teaching children how to learn', & so on, are gratuitous & unnecessary. The demand of children is for large quantities of 'mind food'. But information is not such food: that which they will assimilate must be put in literary form, must be of the arresting sort that one knows at a single reading: given this ^{kind} sort of intellectual diet, & they are omnivorous, history or travel, science or art, nothing comes amiss. The curiosity of children is unbounded ^{as they} range with delight over the whole field of knowledge; variety, is, in fact, as necessary to them as quantity & quality in their intellectual diet.

But youth is the season of discipline & the method of their self-education must supply the ~~exacting~~ ^{strenuous} discipline which young people require. We find this in the old axiom: "The mind can produce nothing but what it can produce in the form of an answer to a question put by the mind to itself." In conformity with this precept, we require children to ~~tell~~ in speech or writing, that which they have acquired, or some part of it. We find ourselves here, again, standing on the bedrock of nature; ^{for} such 'telling' proves to be natural & delightful to children & they throw much of themselves into it. Behold, ~~without~~ without any direct effort on our part, every one of the 'faculties' is developing like flower or leaf-buds after spring showers! Recognising these & some other points in the behaviour of mind, anybody's mind, we are able to draw up alarmingly full syllabuses of work, term by term, which the children revel in & cover easily, & are prepared to enjoy the week of 'examination' with which each term ends.

In the act of narrating the early self-examination suggested for or continuously, for after every spoken or written sentence the mind asks itself 'What next?' and may not be disturbed during such narration by questions or remarks from the teacher.

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These examinations serve the same purpose as the narrations which follow each period of study; they are rather records (& very full records), than tests.

Since the wise action of the Board of Education in substituting friendly inspections for formal examinations, the children who attend elementary schools are especially open to receive a "liberal education". Their natural love of knowledge has free play because they are not distracted by competition in any ^{chap} form; they do not work for prizes or place & so are peculiarly open to what has been called the "joy of ^{ea} learning".

This temper of ^{to be found in} Council Schools is well illustrated by extracts from a few letters from the boys of a big school, ^{Miss} which came to be written because ^{Governments} students who have been trained at a certain Secondary Training College have been asked to give a little help in Nature Study to town schools. ~~The ladies are scattered over the country usually as governesses in families,~~ the plan is for a governess & her pupils to undertake a school, sending from time to time such specimens of twig or flower as are required for the term's work. But I cannot introduce the boys' letters better than by an extract from Miss ^{Dr. L.} D.'s, the more so as it ^{is} makes a point to which I am anxious to call attention. "The 'bird search' the boys refer to is the notes on the hours of the birds' ^{parents' names} songs suggested in the February P.R.. Miss S- & Miss M- with their pupils & I with my two are keeping an account of the birds which sing

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 & the hours & the weather in which they sing. These lists we are going to exchange every month, & M- suggested that the boys should join us. I wish you could see how happy S- & M- are over it. They have thrown themselves into it heart & soul & are full of ideas & plans to give the boys pleasure & help them. It is bound to have a lasting influence on these two girls & the boys that they have found this ground of common interest is'nt it? Does'nt it all make one see visions of the future with a new sympathy & understanding binding all "classes". I am so glad that S- & M- have this wonderful opportunity". Here are some fragments from the letters of the boys which are much too short to do justice to the writers:-

"Do you fancy Coriolanus & Last Days of Pompeii, they interest me fine ... I think the letter you sent us has given us something to think about when we go in the parks or woods & notice the kinds of birds...
 "We are learning out of books now which are very interesting especially Coriolanus. I would like to know which book you like best of all"....
 "We have not seen or heard many birds yet but as time goes on we are going to copy your example & listen for them in the woods.... We are getting very brown bread & not much sugar & tapers. Flour is 3/5 a stone per stone. I want to know how you like the Science books & Coriolanus. I like them very much..." The birds are helping to make things happier since they started singing once more especially the thrush & the lark"...." I should like to spend about a week doing nothing else but examining the trees & watching for the birds"...."

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the hours & the weather in which they sing. These lists we are going to exchange every month. M- suggested that the boys should join us. I wish you could see how happy S- & M- are over it all.

We have been comparing your twigs with the twigs we get at ---
 & they are not a patch on yours"....." The best twigs are the
 horse chestnut, oak & ash....the scar on the horsechestnut is very plain
 plain & the cluster of buds upon the oak"....."I have only seen
 one tree that came anything near as good as the ones from Oxford"...
 "We should be very pleased if you would send us some idea about the
 birds in your parts"..... "At school we are reading some of Shakes-
 peare's plays such as 'As You Like It' & 'Julius Caesar'. At
 present we are reading Coriolanus & we have read Evangeline by
 Longfellow"....." I wish I was going with ~~you~~ you searching for
 because I am interested in birds"....."There are not many birds
 over here. There are only crows & shepsters & robins & we see just a
 few seagulls."

I venture to add two complete letters which give a fair
 fair idea of the rest, the point being ^{the boys in the North and} that the two girls in the South
 are working on an identical syllabus & therefore have much in common,
 although the girls may include more subjects.

As I have said, I call ^{men} ~~attention~~ witnesses to support certain points which I wish to make: a liberal education based on wide reading ^{help towards} should ~~make~~ ^{help} for joyous living in whatever circumstances the boy or ~~girl~~ ^{people} may be placed: it should make for a happy home life in the present & afford memories enriched with all the pageantry of literature, exquisite scenes over which we have laughed or wept with those dear to us, & is there a closer bond? It should afford the intellectual ~~foundations~~ ground work for rational social intercourse: It should, as Miss D. suggests, bridge over the disastrous gulf which separates social classes, & ~~rather~~ restore something of the friendship resting on common interests which existed everywhere before the days of vast industrial undertakings; a friendship which has asserted itself again in the relations between officers & men in the Army. Here we get a happy

by the time he is twelve, he should have read & thought a good deal.
But it is never too late to mend, because education is a state
which you may enter at any port by any route. Men must have
knowledge if they are to be fully alive & it remains true that the
proper knowledge for mankind is man & that the best avenues for
this knowledge are through history, literature & art.

Being that we hope Labour Members have come to
stay, whichever party be in power, & that Labour may
always be represented in the Cabinet, it becomes our
bounden duty & service to all that a liberal
education is within reach of the child of Labouring
men. The labour system is common property
but every child's child leaves school in possession
of his labour unimpaired & the schools, not withstanding
a most generous outlay upon them of money, talent,
labour & zeal, continue to send out young people with
unimpaired intelligence, with little power of self-
occupation, or of interesting or even amusing themselves.
We of the PS&S believe that the remedy lies in a
common & very liberal curriculum for all ages
under 16, including the reading in school hours of all
a hundred best books - the sort of books that educate
persons of any age take pleasure in. When it is at all possible
these books should be provided by the parents, & become

from property of the state by every one (see above)

aloud.) While in the blacksmith's shop he learnt many portions of Shakespeare, with a decided preference for Hamlet."

Because, to quote the wise words of Sir Joshua Reynolds, "it appears of what great consequence it is that our minds should be habituated to the contemplation of excellence, & that, far from being contented to make such habits the discipline of our youth only, we should to the last moment of our lives continue a settled intercourse with all the true examples of grandeur. Their inventions are not only the food of our infancy, but the substance which supplies the fullest maturity of our vigour. The mind is but a barren soil which is soon exhausted, & will produce no crop, or only one, unless it be continually fertilised & enriched with foreign matter".

For these reasons the Platonic idea of a lifelong education should, I think, be embraced, methodised, & organised by an Association which aims at upholding the principles of personal liberty & personal responsibility.

A society aiming at such amelioration of the conditions of life as should liberate the powers of the individual & give him scope for his development. Must make it a chief concern of every liberal student to way man's place in the world, in modern days.